

A Dish Served Cold:

Analysis of American-Soviet relations during the Cold War

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"We helped keep the Cold War cold. . . .A war without casualties cannot be as famous as a horrible war, but it is preferable" -Edward Teller

The Cold War was not started by any single event, but rather by a series of events and a lack of trust. In addition to the quote above, it would also be appropriate to give a working definition of the Cold War to start out this report. **The Cold War** – Competition between the Soviet Union and the United States over ideologies, through other countries and through social media, but without direct armed conflict (Rietzler 2011).

This report will coincide with a website created on Weebly.com relating to the American views of the Soviet Union through Cold War era sports movies (Specifically *Rocky IV* and *Miracle*). This report will act as a background to the website, giving a historical context to help make sense of what the website has to offer. This report begins near the end of World War II.

As it became obvious that the Allies were going to win World War II, the "friendship" between the Russians and Americans began to fray. Both countries started to jockey for position in a postwar world. This emerging competition for control of foreign governments and systems, as well as resources, began the Cold War.

Armed communist rebellions began in Greece and Turkey in 1946. The US shipped weapons to put down the rebellions. The Soviet Union blockaded West Berlin in 1948, and the US responded with a year-long airlift of supplies. The Western powers formed the NATO alliance for self defense. The Soviets responded with the Warsaw Pact. In 1949, the USSR developed its first nuclear weapon.

No one of these events started the Cold War, but in combination and rapid succession, it was inevitable.

Control, NATO, and WATO

A dominant theme during the Cold War was control. Different types of control included territorial, control of natural resources, or fundamental beliefs along which life is led (Karlin 2003). As Americans, our society has been marked by independence and rugged individualism. We allow ourselves to play and view characters who act with romanticism and bravado. Part of the reason we had poor relations with the Soviet Union was because they represented quite the opposite during the Cold War. They took away individualism and focused more on things like ideologies, which were made to seem more important than people.

The United States had the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which stood for capitalism and had a technological advantage, but not the large military numbers of its eastern counterparts. The Soviet Union had the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WATO), which represented command and socialism. The military numbers of the Soviets were massive and its effectiveness couldn't be questioned.

International Education about the Cold War

The Soviet Union and the United States had different approaches in educating internationally during the Cold War. The international education program of the Soviet Union was successful in reproducing existing dominant ideology and social structure only in foreign

states in which Soviet leadership controlled the socially valued and legitimate cultural meanings (Tsvetkova 2008).

The Space Race

A very important and largely meaningful part of the Cold War is the subject of the Space Race between the USSR and the United States. The Soviets had the first successes at the outset, but the U.S. achieved the ultimate success over the course of the competition. All Soviet feats were met and passed by the American space programs. This is because of Americans having more sophisticated applications satellites, which brought about accomplishments like sending several men to the moon on various occasions while the USSR was not able to follow suit.

There are many reasons the U.S. was ultimately more successful than the Soviets during the Space Race. According to historian Trevor Brown, there are three reasons. The three independent variables determining the ultimate success of the U.S. space program in comparison to the Soviet Union space program are:

1. The focuses of the space programs
2. The economic philosophies of the two states
3. A penchant for excessive secrecy, or lack thereof, in their respective scientific communities. (Brown 2011)

Brown states here that he feels like Americans were better at keeping secrecy in the scientific community. This is important to address because secrecy was an important theme of the Cold War. Obviously Americans and Soviets alike didn't want their secrets regarding weaponry, space programs, technological advances to be made public, and this is because it

would allow the opposition to catch up if it were behind to start. This is part of what allowed the U.S. to catch up to and surpass Soviet space accomplishments.

Furthermore, Brown states in his independent variables that the Americans won the space race because of how much time, effort, and money it would put into the space programs. After Sputnik was released by the Soviets in October of 1957, the United States felt the need to show the Russians they would join the race and created NASA within the following year. Accomplishments shortly followed in the subsequent twelve years with missions like Project Mercury, Project Gemini, and the Apollo program.

There was substantial fear of technological development followed by the creation of Russian technological space advances. The nature of responses to Sputnik is especially notable. It is argued, in light of the tendency to assume an American love affair with technology across all areas of social and political life. The advancement of Sputnik created a strand of technological determinism that made Americans feel the need to advance technologically and set forth with a 'skill thinking' approach to technology assumed to be characteristic of the American outlook during the Cold War and beyond (Peoples 2008).

The Arms Race

Another vital element of the Cold war involved the arms race between the United States and the USSR. This race is believed to be started by the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan by atomic weapons developed by the U.S in August of 1945. The arms race lasted from then until November of 1990 when the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty was signed.

Historian John Swift argued in a report about the arms race that the real motive of the U.S. in using the atomic weapons was less to force a Japanese defeat than to warn the Soviet Union to be amenable to the U.S. in the postwar construction (Swift 2009).

U.S. Radio Broadcasting

U.S. radio broadcasting relating to the Soviet Union had an effect in the early decades of the Cold War. Americans used Radio Liberty and broadcasted U.S. propaganda to undermine the power of the Soviet Communist government (Mikkonen 2010). The U.S. used this as a form of psychological warfare, and the effectiveness can be looked at in varying degrees. It was another form of banal nationalism, as the truth was often bent so as to make Americans believe that what the U.S. government was doing was right and what the Communist Soviets were doing was unethical and wrong.

Laws Regarding American Cultural Products

Understandably enough, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union didn't have the greatest feelings toward American cinema. The Soviets made several laws concerning the import of American films. In fact, these laws led to most American cultural products being rejected as unfit for consumption (Kapterev 2009). The same was surely true regarding Soviet products in the U.S. as well.

Use of Sport by President Johnson

During the Cold War, President Lyndon B. Johnson looked to make use of sports in two different ways: to enhance the physical fitness of the American people and to use American

success in international competition (particularly the Olympic Games) as a weapon against the Soviet regime (Hunt 2006). President Johnson put the accomplishments out there for all to know. He especially emphasized the victories against the USSR. During Johnson's time in office, however, some historians say that this plan failed because of a few reasons. Even though American athletes had good showings in 1964 and 1968 in Tokyo and Mexico City, it was undermined by political incidents and civil rights protests by athletes during the time. This hurt the effects these successes had on our society.

How do films affect us and how do we affect films?

In an effort to understand the attitudes toward the Soviet Union during World War II and the Cold War, several historians have considered films to be one of the least developed sources in the writing of history. There are two questions that someone making a movie must seek to answer:

1. How do motion pictures affect images?
2. How can the historian manage such an unusual source? (Small 1972)

This also brings up the question of whether movies shape what the people think, or if they are just a reflection of what people think. It would have to be a combination of both, but where does one draw the line? It's an interesting thing to think about, and in the end, it can probably be said that movies and people reflect each other.

Movies portraying American–Soviet Relations and Vice-Versa

Movies like *Miracle*, *Rocky IV*, and *Rambo* (the latter two which are Sylvester Stallone movies) are without a doubt Cold War related movies. In the aforementioned *Miracle* the

American hockey teams is an underdog fighting communism and in *Rocky IV* similar storylines are present. Rocky Balboa is a boxer who represents the hardworking American who does things in a Spartan-like manner. He faces off against the big and tall Ivan Drago, who represents Communist Russia.

Another movie that is not analyzed as much for its Cold War themes is the *Rambo* series of films, which in one part of a film, Rambo kills dozens of Russians while rescuing Americans being held prisoner in Southeast Asia. Russians have complained that Americans kill Soviets in films with a sort of “perverse relish” (Taubman 1986).

Further complaining was seen around the same time period of 1986 when Soviet cultural officials said that *Rambo* and *Rocky IV* were “...part of a deliberate propaganda campaign to portray Russians as cruel and treacherous enemies.” (Taubman 1986)

To somehow strike back, the USSR created a *Rambo* of its own. *Solo Voyage* (or in Russian: *Odinochnoye Plavaniye*) shows a hero who is very Rambo-like and leads his men to fight the evil Americans. He takes down American soldiers with all sorts of weapons and is eventually shot down from the back by an American. His death makes the Americans seem cruel and heartless.

News Reports involving the U.S. Olympic Hockey Team

Around the time of the 1980 Olympics, major newspapers in the United States (through commentaries, photographs, and columns) covered the American Hockey team during their Olympic Campaign. Newspapers during that time used a lot of melodrama to make the

American team seem like overachieving underdogs who were thrust into the belly of the beast in a hockey game against what was widely regarded as the greatest hockey team in the world, and came out victors.

Specifically, this work discovered that the identity of the 1980 US. Hockey team and the Soviet Union were defined by the struggle created through the Cold War (Seifried 2010). The Americans represented freedom and were more or less seen as its protectors fighting off the advance of communism.

On the other hand you have the Soviets who were mostly identified as destructive, imperialistic, and corrupt machines. These machines were looking to infringe on other people by exerting their socialist and communist ways on the rest of the world and taking away the social rights of those it invaded and governed.

Many believe that this type of news reporting was rather irresponsible and childlike. It takes the American perspective and amplifies it to give people more of a sense of banal nationalism and a negative look at the Soviet Union.

Soviet Movie: *Meeting on the Elbe*

Just as Americans have several movies to depict U.S.-Soviet relations during the Cold War, so did the Soviet Union. In an article about the movie *Meeting on the Elbe*, Isabelle de Keghel describes the involvement of Soviet actors and filmmakers in a depiction of how the Cold War was started. The movie showed the contrasting effects of the occupational policies of both superpowers.

Meeting on the Elbe is set in post-war Germany, and it makes crucial assumptions concerning the Soviet self and the American “other”. It attributes the full responsibility for the outbreak of the Cold War to the US-American political and military elites and argues the USSR has won the trust and support of the Germans due to its superior 'soft power' (de Keghel 2009).

The use of film by the Soviets is understandable and is another form of banal nationalism. Only, in this case, the shoe is on the other foot. Americans in turn take a blow from the Soviets, as they are portrayed as the bad guy, and the Soviets are shown as the good guys who are simply responding to the Americans and their cause for the outbreak of the Cold War.

Why the Cold War Ended

There are many factors that led to the end of the Cold War. There has been some debate over time of whether America’s key leaders were doing one of several things. Either:

1. Basing their foreign policies primarily in response to reductions in Soviet power
2. Basing them on forming cooperative international policies
3. Or trying to change Soviet domestic policies (Haas 2007)

Historian Mark Haas believes American leaders and their beliefs that the Cold War was ending closely match up with Soviet institutional changes. This helps to both illustrate the key determinants of leaders' perceptions of international threats and explain why outstanding Cold War disputes were resolved so smoothly, with the American people mostly attempting to reassure the Soviets rather than persuading them.

Opinions after the War

Even briefly after the Cold War ended, Americans are still were plenty wary of the former Soviet

Union, its citizens, and their behaviors. Americans favor firmness in dealing with the Soviet Union. Interestingly enough, the majority of Americans show that they have some faith in having relations with the Soviet Union and their government, and wish for them to be engaged in negotiations every other country is involved in as well.

The opinions of Americans relating to the Soviet Union are susceptible to change as a cause of many Americans learning about the Soviet Union mainly from news on television (Hinckley, 1989). The perceptions and attitudes of some Americans changed towards American/Soviet relations because of Gorbachev's ascension to power. This suggests that (for the most part) American attitudes have been reasonable and have responded to events in a seemingly logical manner and that those who form US foreign policies should take into account the American public opinion before it deliberates on what to do in certain situations.

All-in-all, American-Soviet relations during the Cold War was not the greatest. Movies, newspapers, radio, politicians, sports, and more helped shape our views of each other, both supporting cultural biases while these same biases helped influence what was in the movies, newspapers, etc. Post-war relations are much better than they were during, but Americans still generally think of Russians as cold socialist robot-like people. Maybe the day will come when there is some form of media that presents Russia in a more positive way. At that time, maybe we will be able to break through cultural biases and see them in a different way.

“We didn't win the Cold War, we were just a big bank that bankrupted a smaller bank because we had an arms race that wiped the Russians out” – Norman Mailer